

February 29th, 2012

Subcommittee Ranking Member, Rep. Peter Visclosky

"I would add my welcome. Administrator Tom D'Agostino, Dr. Cook, General Finan, it is good to have you before us today.

"The national security missions of the NNSA are vital to the interests of the United States, not only the nuclear weapons program, but also to the nuclear navy and the nuclear nonproliferation mission we will hear about next week. The matters we are discussing today are substantively profound and they also involve considerable sums of money. Our responsibility is to ensure that the dollars provided by the American taxpayer for the weapons complex are spent pursuant to a coherent strategy and as wisely as possible. I want to make clear to you that there is nothing I take more seriously in my role as a Member of Congress than the issues surrounding the decisions of war and peace in general, and nuclear weapons in particular.

"As you well know, I have advocated for an enduring 21st century strategy for our nation's nuclear deterrence for some time. I was hopeful that the latest Nuclear Posture Review and the Section 1251 complex modernization report would be the foundation of that strategy. However, recent reports indicate that the Administration is again evaluating a range of options for restructuring our nuclear forces. While I support any analysis that will contribute to intelligent and informed decision making, I am concerned that we still do not have a contemporary, comprehensive strategy that will guide us over the next decade and beyond.

"Looking ahead, important and resource-intensive decisions will be necessary regarding the recapitalization of the nation's nuclear deterrence triad – decisions that will drive the strategic force for decades to come. I would hope that these decisions are driven by policy rather than resource constraints. However, we cannot avoid the reality that we are in a time of fiscal austerity and we must make investments with an eye towards those that produce the greatest benefit to our national security.

"I appreciate the work that you have done at the NNSA Mr. D'Agostino, in particular your efforts

to address the concerns of this Subcommittee throughout the years. I appreciate that you made hard choices in this budget request and the Subcommittee will endeavor to understand the implications of those choices as we move through the process. However, I am concerned that some of the choices call into question the process by which the needs of the complex are defined. On several fronts there are changes in direction that I recall previously being an anathema to your mission, Pit Disassembly and Conversion Facility (PDCF), Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement (CMRR), and the changes to the B-61 Life Extension Program (LEP) are just a few examples. The challenge these changes present, even for those who might support them, is that after years of being told that there is only one alternative to address an issue, the NNSA has now found a way to obviate or delay the need for that requirement.

"On the one hand, this points to the fundamental ingenuity that our nation's engineers and scientists possess, something that we can rightly all take pride in. On the other, it points to an organization that backs into decisions only after being faced with resource realities. I hope that we can all work toward a plan for the weapons complex that both meets the mission needs and recognizes the challenges of our current budget environment. I have confidence that you will work diligently toward that end.

"Mr. D'Agostino, while this is a hearing on the weapons program, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that you now also are responsible for the Environmental Management (EM) program in addition to the NNSA. With this reorganization, you now own the vast majority of large operating and construction projects within the Department. I will make a point to you that I made yesterday to the Secretary: if strong leadership and fundamental management reform are not forthcoming at the Department of Energy, it will significantly inhibit the execution of your mission as well as the Department's credibility.

"Issues of project management, corporate governance, and workplace safety are not the most exciting issues to tackle – but they are vital to the success of your mission. I hope that you will take some time today to update us on your actions in this regard and any progress you have made in getting EM and NNSA off the GAO's high risk list.

"I look forward to hearing your testimony. Mr. Chairman, I thank you for the time."

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